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AUTHOR Serow, Robert C.
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ABSTRACT

While existing research suggests that schools have only indirect effects on students' racial and political attitudes, the social and demographic characteristics of desegregated classrooms may produce certain normative and behavioral outcomes which encourage children to accept human diversity encountered in concrete situations. This pattern of functional tolerance is a prerequisite for successful participation in the institutions of modern, heterogeneous society, and therefore represents an important aspect of citizenship training in public schools. It can be argued that universalism, achievement, and specificity take an additional significance within the racially and ethnically desegregated classroom. It seems highly probable that the child's prolonged exposure to concrete applications of universalistic standards will have considerable impact on his or her judgments and behaviors in intergroup settings in the school and elsewhere. Children's acceptance of universalistic norms is likely to be of vital importance in their preparation for adulthood. There exists a clear correspondence between those universalistic norms that govern classroom life and the standards which regulate other institutions. The child's experiences in desegregated classrooms may have added value in that they provide exposure to the systematic application of impartial standards across racial lines. (Author/MK)

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Robert C. Serow
School of Education
North Carolina State University

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Introduction

A traditional function of public education in the United States is the socialization of tolerance for political and ethnic diversity. From the earliest days of the Republic, Americans have expected schools to play a critical role in transmitting a political philosophy strongly supportive of individual freedoms. Jefferson, for instance, argued that some form of advanced education would be necessary if the nation's future leaders were to preserve "the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens."¹ By the mid-nineteenth century, equal emphasis had come to be attached to public education's potential for fostering improved relations between the native-born majority of Americans and the millions of European immigrants who were arriving in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest. It was hoped that the mixing of nationality groups within the classroom would "kindle a spirit of mutual amity and respect which the strains and cleavages of adult life could never destroy."² And in our own time, the importance attached to schooling as a means of citizenship training and social integration has been amply demonstrated in a number of desegregation, school prayer, and students' rights rulings handed down by the Supreme Court. In Brown v. Board of Education the Court's unanimous opinion suggested that

"...education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society...It is the very foundation of good citizenship."³

Classroom Structures and the Socialization of Tolerance

ROBERT C. SEROW, North Carolina State University

Abstract

This paper offers a new interpretation of the school's role in fostering tolerance for diversity. While existing research suggests that schools have only indirect effects on students' racial and political attitudes, the social and demographic characteristics of desegregated classrooms may produce certain normative and behavioral outcomes which encourage children to accept the human diversity that they encounter in concrete situations. Furthermore, this pattern of functional tolerance is a prerequisite for successful participation in the institutions of a modern, heterogeneous society, and therefore represents an important, if overlooked, aspect of citizenship training in public schools.

In view of these expectations, it comes as no surprise that one of the strongest correlates of both civic and social toleration is indeed educational attainment. Even when the influence of potentially confounding variables (such as socioeconomic status) is taken into account, the individual's level of schooling turns out to be a good predictor of support for civil liberties and of favorable attitudes towards minority groups.⁴ What is not clear, however, are the ways and means by which educational institutions bring about these outcomes. The overall conclusion of existing research on political socialization and intergroup relations is that most specific school variables (such as courses, teacher characteristics, classroom and school climates, peer group patterns, and extracurricular activities) have very little if any impact on pupils' acceptance of diversity.⁵ Consequently, there has been a tendency to attribute the linkage between education and tolerance to some amorphous construct, usually labelled "cultural sophistication" or "cosmopolitanism," which is supposedly the mark of the well-educated person.⁶ This interpretation may be difficult for educators to accept, insofar as it implies that there is little that schools can do directly to promote mutual acceptance and trust among students. At a time when educational enrollments are becoming more diversified as a result of racial desegregation, mainstreaming of the handicapped, and consolidations and mergers in rural areas, it seems essential that we gain a clearer understanding of what is possible by way of tolerance socialization in the public schools.

The present paper advances some ideas for clarifying the relationship between education and tolerance for diversity. In particular, we wish to make two major points: first, the existing research on this topic tends to be technically flawed and theoretically unsound, and has only the most tenuous connection with the practice of political and intergroup toleration

in "real world" settings; secondly, researchers have so far generally ignored the school's "hidden curriculum" as a source of those very norms which promote tolerant behaviors in the public and semi-public institutions of diverse, democratic society.

Limitations of Existing Research

The body of literature that we are calling "tolerance research" actually consists of two separate lines of inquiry: political socialization and intergroup relations. In the former, investigators typically explore relationships between formal or informal school structures and changes in students' views towards civil liberties and democratic process in general. Intergroup research includes evaluations of instructional programs in race relations and assessments of children's racial/ethnic relations in desegregated schools. While we will not be able to review these findings here, it is fair to say that the overall picture of school effects that emerges from both fields is very disappointing. By now, most observers would probably agree with Jennings and Niemi that the impact of school variables on students' political orientations is "feeble" and "uneven".⁷ Similarly, Schofield speaks for other researchers in characterizing the results of intergroup research as "utterly inconclusive."⁸ Furthermore, contrary to the view that it is the college or university rather than the elementary or secondary school that is the prime mechanism for tolerance socialization,⁹ it is now fairly clear that higher education does not exercise an influence greater than that of other levels of schooling. As has been reported in a number of studies, the relationship between tolerance and education is essentially linear, increasing steadily with each incremental unit of attainment.¹⁰

Based on these findings it is tempting to conclude that tolerance for human diversity is a cumulative product of education-in-general rather than a direct result of specific school experiences. That is, the tendency of the relatively well-educated to express support for the principles of political democracy and racial equality appears to stem from one's overall exposure to various social and intellectual stimuli during the school and college years.

We suspect that this is only part of the answer. To be sure, formal education, just like almost any form of social involvement, is a broadening experience which makes one more receptive to, or perhaps simply less threatened by, the expression of individual or group diversity.¹¹ On the other hand, we should not overlook the possibility that researchers' inability to establish specific school effects is also in part a consequence of the methods they have employed. Consider that both political and intergroup research rely heavily on attitudinal measures of tolerance, which are often so straightforward that they permit the respondent to "see through" a survey item and provide a "correct" (i.e., socially desirable response), whether or not that response reflects his or her actual sentiments. Accordingly, there will be insufficient variation in responses to establish a meaningful correlation between an educational stimulus and an attitudinal response. This problem is particularly acute with better-educated samples, who are more likely to know the "correct" response and to understand how their answers will be interpreted. Hence, the true correlation between tolerant orientations and educational attainment may be somewhat inflated, thereby leading to the conclusion that tolerance is a cumulative outcome of formal education

per se.¹² In addition, we must question the meaningfulness or salience of many survey items. Especially in the case of children, questions about race relations or civil liberties may have little direct relevance for respondents.¹³ Under these circumstances, it is doubtful that survey responses permit useful conclusions about school socialization experiences.

What we are leading up to is the suggestion that the study of attitudes may not be appropriate for gaining insights into the development of tolerance for diversity. Attitudes are, of course, one aspect of toleration, but they do not constitute the entirety of this concept, nor even its most important component. To provide a complete and accurate assessment of a person's tolerance for political or social diversity, it is necessary to examine not only the direction and strength of a particular sentiment, but also its relation to underlying values and beliefs and to one's willingness to take appropriate action.¹⁴ In this light, it is somewhat disconcerting to discover that attitudes towards the principles of toleration often bear little relation to more specific racial and political sentiments or to actual behaviors.¹⁵ Moreover, there is a growing conviction among social scientists that what individuals say or feel about political processes or racial relations is of much less consequence than what they do about them. For example, it is generally established the successful desegregation of institutions does not require any great degree of racial brotherhood among participants. Instead, the critical factor appears to be the willingness and ability of authorities to apply enforcement mechanisms which will ensure participants' compliance with the desegregation policy.¹⁶ Similarly, a number of political scientists have concluded that the preservation

of individual liberties hinges primarily on an active commitment to democratic processes by national and community elites. What is required of ordinary citizens is merely a willingness to go along with existing arrangements. Lipset and Raab have described this as a "loyalty based on an inertia of investment in the country, system, and traditional political structure."¹⁷ The same general theme also characterizes some philosophers' views on cultural pluralism. According to Wolff, the "characteristic virtue" of a pluralist democracy is a highly pragmatic type of tolerance, i.e., "the ungrudging acknowledgement of the right of opposed interests to exist and to be pursued."¹⁸ And Pratte has argued that because the complex nature of industrialized societies imposes on subgroups a high degree of interdependence, it has become essential for groups to arrive at a modus vivendi which recognizes the rights and interests of all parties while contributing to the attainment of the most fundamental social objectives, such as production and distribution of goods and the provision of collective security.¹⁹ Although both Wolff and Pratte acknowledge that tolerance can and should be regarded as a social ideal, it is evident that for both authors, the essence of toleration in modern societies is a highly functional, self-interested pattern of mutual forbearance and collaboration among the members of diverse groups.

All of this seems to suggest that educational research, with its persistent focus on students' attitudes, has not yet been caught up in the developing trend in other fields towards a reconceptualization of tolerance as an essentially behavioral phenomenon. Yet there has been some movement in this direction, particularly among desegregation

researchers. Elizabeth Cohen, for one, appears to advocate a pragmatic approach to the study of tolerance socialization:

"The mechanism of desegregation is not intended to create universal love and brotherhood. The goal of the desegregation process is a reasonable degree of social integration and a lack of overt conflict whereby blacks and whites, given an objective important to both, can trust each other and listen to each other sufficiently well to complete the task at hand."²⁰

Furthermore, several recent studies of desegregated schools have included systematic observations of pupils' cross-racial behavior. In contrast to the overall conclusions of the earlier research, these later investigations have turned up indications that children's intergroup relations are influenced by certain classroom factors, such as task structures and teacher behaviors.²¹ Nevertheless, it will not be enough simply to count or describe interactions and relate them to various classroom conditions. Rather, behavioral observation, we are told, should be used as a device to gain insights into the "motivational structure of human action."²² In a closely regulated setting such as the typical public school classroom, one of the strongest motivating factors is likely to be the child's desire to comply with prevailing rules and policies. So, if children display a consistent pattern of behavior in certain situations (such as a high level of favorable cross-racial interaction in cooperative work groups), we need to consider what norms there may be which induce such behaviors. Until linkages among classroom structures, behavioral norms, and overt behaviors are revealed, we will be able to produce only

descriptions of, and educated guesses about, children's intergroup relations and not a comprehensive understanding of the tolerance socialization process.

At the present time, there does exist a body of work which addresses the relationship between classroom norms and long-term socialization outcomes. This approach, usually known as the hidden curriculum, has been elaborated in a variety of ways, but has so far not directly focused on children's development of political or racial tolerance. In the remaining section of this paper, we will apply a hidden curriculum analysis to the case of desegregated classrooms, in hopes of suggesting some of the ways the children's participation in those settings may lead them towards a broader acceptance of the human diversity that they will encounter as citizens of a pluralistic society.

Latent Socialization in the Classroom

According to Robert Merton, most forms of social organization are characterized by both manifest functions (conscious motivations and intentions) and latent functions (the objective consequences for participants). As an example, Merton argues that the recognized purpose of the Hopi rain ceremony may be to produce rainfall, but it also has the effect of providing an opportunity for unity and shared activity within the tribe.²³

The analysis of latent functions is precisely the point of most of the hidden curriculum arguments advanced in recent years. Bowles and Gintis suggest the authoritarian patterns of school organization and governance which characterize the educational experiences of working-class

students have the objective consequence of reinforcing the culture of the home, and thereby reduce prospects for social mobility.²⁴ In a similar vein, Ogbu contends that standard educational practices (such as achievement and IQ testing and ability grouping) in effect perpetuate those minority subcultural patterns which are dysfunctional for success in the larger society.²⁵ On the other hand, several analysts emphasize the distinctions between classroom and family socialization mechanisms, and propose that the latent outcomes of school routines more effectively prepare children for life in a modern industrial society. In Parsons' view, certain features of the classroom (particularly age-grading, systematic evaluation, and a clear demarcation of student and teacher roles) contribute to the development of those skills and capacities required for fulfillment of adult role responsibilities.²⁶ A study by Jackson emphasizes the consequences of school ecology. Given the relatively crowded conditions that prevail in most classrooms, most students learn the necessity of balancing individual interests with those of the class as a whole, and also come to accept the utilization of impersonal modes of authority and evaluation.²⁷ Finally, in what may be the most detailed elaboration of this line of analysis, Dreeben focuses on four norms, essential to both democratic political structures and to large scale bureaucratic organizations, which he asserts are promoted by the everyday routine of public schools. These norms, and the means by which they are developed, are as follows:

- 1) Independence, fostered primarily by the high ratio of students to teachers, which requires considerable unsupervised effort and self-reliance by pupils.

- 2) Achievement, acquired through classroom grading practices which stress competition against a standard of excellence.
- 3) Universalism, which students learn as a result of their own treatment as members of a social category (e.g., kindergarteners, third graders), rather than as individuals.
- 4) Specificity (the application of limited precise criteria for evaluation), also learned through the emphasis on performance, and the disregard for background characteristics.²⁸

While Dreeben's point is that these standards are transmitted by the modal properties of education, and are thus implicit in the structures of any school, it can be argued that universalism, achievement, and specificity take on added significance within the racially and ethnically desegregated classroom. It seems highly probable that the child's prolonged (i.e., twelve year) exposure to concrete applications of universalistic standards will have considerable impact on his or her judgements and behaviors in intergroup settings in the school and elsewhere. For example, as children learn that they are judged on the basis of their performances rather than their backgrounds, and that a common set of expectations applies to all members of the class, they come to understand that certain personal characteristics such as race or ethnicity are of little significance in the conduct of the daily routine. Furthermore, as Jackson²⁹ has argued, both the crowded conditions prevailing within the classroom and the balance of power between teacher and students characteristically lead children to subordinate particularistic concerns to the general welfare. In most cases, overt displays of racial antagonism (fighting, arguing, refusal to work with members of different groups) would constitute a violation

of the instructional routine and would be met with relatively severe penalties. Under such circumstances, students are required to arrive at some arrangement - at very least a tenuous cease-fire - whereby teaching and learning can be carried on. Finally, the fact that the teacher is a member of a different racial/ethnic group than some of the pupils in a desegregated classroom may also contribute to the child's internalization of a neutral or "color blind" approach to social behavior. More often than not, the teacher's personal identity is of much less consequence to students than the fact that he or she has significant power over them.

But beyond providing a reasonable basis for classroom management, children's acceptance of universalistic norms is likely to be of vital importance in their preparation for adulthood. Universalism, specificity, and achievement have long been recognized as key characteristics of bureaucracy, which is, of course, the dominant mode of formal organization in modern societies.³⁰ Virtually any large scale business enterprise, government agency, or civic association is marked by some degree of the following: clear specification of responsibilities, an emphasis on technical competence as a basis for rewards, separation of personal and official interests, and reliance on precise rules and regulations.³¹ Thus, in order to perform successfully in such institutions, the individual must learn to exclude "love, hatred, and every purely personal, especially irrational and incalculable feeling from the execution of official tasks."³² In broad terms, these same principles can be seen as underlying the American political and legal systems. As a case in point, consider Glazer's suggestion that the official national policy towards intergroup relations is one of benign neutrality, in that all diverse subgroups are protected from discrimination, but are afforded no legal identity otherwise.³³ This spirit of neutrality is reflected in the Constitution and its Amendments (particularly the First, Fifteenth

and Nineteenth), and in numerous federal laws. The strongest recent statement of this position is contained in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin in the fields of education, employment, public accommodations, and elsewhere.

The point being made is that there exists a clear correspondence between those universalistic norms that govern classroom life and the standards which regulate other public and semi-public institutions. As the child participates in classroom routines, he or she will usually come to accept those norms and perhaps rely on them as guides for behavior in other settings. In view of the importance that Americans have attached to racial identification, the child's experiences in desegregated classrooms may have an added value, in that they provide exposure to the systematic application of impartial standards across racial lines. Consequently, the norms of universalism, specificity, and achievement may have more clarity and salience for these students than for those who attend homogeneous schools.

Conclusion

Having stated the case for a greater emphasis on both functional tolerance and latent socialization, we should add several qualifications. First, the preceding argument has been couched in terms of ideal types. Life in classrooms, of course, is not always as we have described it. In particular, universalism is certainly not an invariant property of teacher-student relations. Rist's study, for instance, showed how

one teacher's social class bias led her to a highly particularistic treatment of her pupils.³⁴ In addition, Bossert has argued the balance of universalism and particularism varies according to the type of instructional format employed, with impartial standards more likely to be characteristic of whole-class activities.³⁵ Secondly, our claim for the generalizability of latent socialization outcomes has a meagre basis in research. We know of little hard evidence indicating that multiracial education leads to greater racial or political toleration in the post-school years. Nevertheless, studies in related fields indicate that generalization of situationally-specific norms (similar to the universalistic standards believed to be applied in the classroom) is not only possible, but likely under certain circumstances. In their extensive experimental research, Breer and Locke³⁶ found that participation in personally rewarding task experiences resulted in the internalization of the norms which regulated the task behaviors. Subsequent application of these standards occurred at two levels: Lateral generalization (transfer to other specific situations), and vertical generalization (formulation of the standard as a basic value). Sniderman³⁷ also maintains that the normative structure of socialization situations can influence more general political dispositions, as was evidenced by a positive relationship between a social learning variable and support for civil liberties. Finally, even some advocates of a strict behaviorist interpretation of political socialization acknowledge that standards learned in a particular setting may have some broader application to situations which closely resemble the original.³⁸

Ultimately, the usefulness of the ideas proposed in this paper will be determined through systematic research on individuals' behavioral and normative development. In the short run, this would include observation of students' interaction patterns in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom. In the best of all possible worlds, it would be useful to follow those students through their adolescence and early adulthood to chart their social performances in other integrated settings. All the while, efforts should be made to document the degree of association among overt behaviors, the individual's acceptance of universalistic norms, and various situation-specific factors. There are, obviously, many hypotheses that could be tested. Until that happens, however, it seems premature to conclude, as others have done, that school experiences play only a marginal role in the socialization of tolerance.

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